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Inaugural Dissertation
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Asclepias Syriaca
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Introduction

Many motives led to the selection of the following vegetable, as the subject of an inaugural dissertation. Its claim to attention has not entirely escaped observation, although no strict or correct investigation of its medical properties has been hitherto made, nor any regular application of it, as far as I know, to the cure of disease.* From analogy, however, or from a vulgar and irregular use of the Asclepias Syriaca, it has been supposed, and found to possess qualities active and powerful. The introduction of a new remedy capable of effecting the cure of any disease of common occurrence, is certainly a valuable addition to the Materia Medica; but how much more valuable is the acquisition, when the medicine is the production of every part of our own soil, and applicable to the removal of many common, and often obstinate diseases? The universality of its growth in our own country, is an advantage that few other medical vegetables so eminently enjoy; and are by no means inconsiderable

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whether we consider the cost or the facility in obtaining our remedies, the latter of which is always a consideration of the utmost importance in the restoration of a patients health, and often in the preservation of his life. Elucidations of this fact it is not necessary to make, since a single reflection on the great necessity of the immediate action of an emetic or other medicine, in cases where an inordinate portion of narcotick or poisonous drugs have been taken into the stomach, sufficiently demonstrates the verity of the position.

The objections made against the addition of new medicines to the old catalogue of remedies, are by no means few nor inconsiderable. But they, like every thing else, have their proper boundaries, beyond which they cannot pass without becoming unworthy of refutation.

To define with exact precision all the qualities that an article should possess in order to be barely admitted, will not perhaps be found easy of accomplishment; yet as a general rule, none should attract notice which have not the power either of repelling or preventing

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disease, or of aiding others, by making the prescriptions more promptly and completely accomplish the object of their administration. On the other hand, we are most deliberately of opinion, that an article which has demonstrated the power either of curing, or preventing disease, or that has assisted others given for this purpose, should most readily be received as a new means of defending the system against the attack, or ravages of disease. Whether this will be universally admitted as being correct or not, it is not easy to determine; for many medical characters whose talents, and professional greatness seem at defiance the shaft of envy or jealousy, have repeatedly declared, that no new remedies were wanting for a malady, which one had so generally cured as to have received in relation to it, the appellation of a specific, as mercury in syphilis, and bark in intermittent fever. With every practitioner of any respectable pretentions to experience, these received specifics, have not unfrequently failed of their reputed success, and thus afforded incontestable proof of the necessity of

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calling in others, which though not perhaps so immediately efficacious, yet are not only advantageously resorted to, but found adequate as auxiliaries to the restoration of health.

Attention is particularly solicited to this part of these preliminary observations, as it is believed a correctness has been observed in relation to the present subject, which, if strictly adhered to in future investigations of it, must prove conclusive.

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Attached as I am to the medical school of Philadelphia, by every tie that can bind the pupil to his alma mater, I hope, in particular, that ere long the professors of Materia Medica and of the practice of physic in that illustrious institution, will make fully known in their lectures to the physicians of the United States the real virtues and uses of this, and all other indigenous plants of their happy country.

Finis